AN

ESSAY

ON THE

BEAUTIES AND EXCELLENCIES

OF

PAINTING, MUSIC AND POETRY,

PRONOUNCED AT THE

ANNIVERSARY COMMENCEMENT

AT

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,

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fends the delicate
individual, the present an
warded. I can say with truth t
tinued aim of my ambition; but shoul
all relenting would prove abortive.

Though man, in his searchings into the oper
windings of nature, is ever fond of prying into the secret causes
and springs of action; yet the human mind, which is the grand source of all profit, and of every pleasure; the important point in which they all emulously centre, has been but by very few, an object of the least enquiry.

The mind of man, whether it derives its essence from a natural emanation of the DEITY; whether it is a substance possessing a middle rank between the coarse elements and the most refined intelligent beings; or whether it is composed, as some conjecture, of a subtle etherial matter: This point, perhaps, rather through vanity, than a desire for truth, is made by some, a subiect
rm debate.

bearings and the ties,
nice dependencies,
pervading soul
the whole?"

...by puerile vanities,
...rly gained a complete as-
...all sordid amusements; but sits,
...the palace of reason it views the grandeur
... of nature, and through that mirror, kens the

"What arm Almighty put those wheeling globes
"In motion, or wound up the vast machine?
"Who bowl'd them flaming through the dark profound,
"Numerous as glittering gems of morning dew?"

But I find the field too spacious; the theatre too grand and important; the scene too profound and solemn to bear a description.

When we attempt to scan the dignity of human nature, shunning with care the expansion of infinitude, we should turn to the arts and sciences, those transpar... mirrors, which, like the stars in the firmament, scatter di... ...wed from the mind of man.

As for the more solid arts; ... utility in common life; bu... refined springs. a... ...as re...

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heart, and re-echo an enchanted melody. These reject with disdain, every thing uncultivated, rude and unpolished. There never has been an age; never a nation; yea, I dare affirm never an individual whose mind, by the cultivation of the fine arts, has not been enobled: Who, for a tribute of praise has not been honored and esteemed.

I find my whole attention is involved in a subject, nice, as it is pleasing

> Important, grand, adorn'd with pomp and shew,
> While scenes o'er scenes present themselves to view;
> Yet while the mind expanding, grasps the whole,
> Throughout confusion reigns, confounding all.

To crowd the polite arts, and confound them together would be quite unpardonable, were it not for the interposition of custom.

For the sake of brevity and perspicuity, I shall confine my present reflections to those arts, the principal beauties of which result from the power of IMITATION.

POETRY, MUSIC, and PAINTING: Of these sister arts, it may be thought difficult to say, which has engrossed the finest moments of a curious mind. Has there ever been a polite nation, where factions have not strived to crown the day with glory and success, each contending for its darling art? Are not the annals of history fresh in our memory, when crowds were ambitious to present their humble offerings of praise and admiration at the shrine of an Homer? And now let us turn the scale. The time has been, when the enraptur'd muse of an Orpheus, soaring aloft, has trampled upon the grandeur and dignity of the poet. The age has passed, when the refined and masterly strokes of the pencil, even commanded the brute creation to admire;* when the graces of an *Apelles* a-

* I have somewhere seen an agreeable story, which, being short and pertinent, is undoubtedly worthy of notice here.

It is related that a painter, having drawn Bucephalus very accurately, with the pencil, desired of Alexander, his sentiments concerning the portraiture. No sooner had Alexander manifested much coldness and indifference in his commendation; but a horse, passing by, at the sight of the picture neighed. The painter, immediately observing, said—See! may it please your Majesty, the brute creation is impressed by beauties in painting, which to you seem wholly unknown.

Zeuxis and Parrhasius were rivals in painting at a public dispute for the prizes. The former painted grapes so near the reality, that they attracted the birds, which picked at them. Beholding this, and relying on such an exquisite judgment of the excellency of the representation;

dorned his locks with a garland, and devoted to his memory an immortal crown of honor.

Thus we are dazzled with the beauty and glory of the IMITATIVE ARTS, which ſhine at a distance with a relative luſtre. But a bare knowledge of their effects produced in ages paſt, is not ſufficient. Our experience has taught us—our reaſon declares—that matters of fact have ever regulated the ſtandard of taſte. Then let the ſting of ambition ſtimulate us to gain an intimate acquaintance—even ſcorn to make the higheſt encomiums a fixed bulwark of principles which are pregnant with conſequences all important.

The beauties, relations, and excellencies of theſe polite arts, ſhall engage the whole attention of my mind, ſteadily aiming at a cloſe regularity and order. In comparing, I ſhall exert myſelf to place each of them in their proper ſpheres, without the leaſt infringement.

There is an apparent air of ſimplicity which runs through every part of painting. It is a ſenſitive art, and when its deſign is to excite in the mind thoſe noble emotions, which ſhine in a few intereſting figures, all blazing forth in action, it claims the higheſt rank, and is quite inimitable. For example, let us take an imagery of Appelles.—Behold a Palemedes! —View a dart piercing his ſide! There ſee a torrent of blood, guſhing out from the fountain of life!—To cloſe the ſcene. Behold! the agonizing pangs of death, deeply engraved on every feature, every muſcle! What! would not our keeneſt emotions be fired at a ſight of this! This, which made the heart of Alexander, hardened in the ſlaughter of the univerſe, relent with bitter groans. That monarch—he trembles!—he turns pale!—yea, he finally ſheds an involuntary tear!

In honor of the moderns, we might boaſt of a production, which is truly the crowning labour of the pencil. Could ever ſolemn pomp be likened, or majeſty compared to our Saviour's tranſfiguration on the mount, drawn by Raphael? What inexpreſſible beauty clouds his perſon!—How beautiful the ſuſpenſion of Moſes and Elias!—How equally ſtriking the

he deſired Parrhaſius immediately to ſhew his rival production. Parrhaſius oppoſed to the painting of Zeuxis, a picture which appeared to be veiled with a curtain. Zeuxis ſaid to him, remove your curtain, that we may ſee what you have to compare. But when he obſerv'd that the curtain itſelf was the picture propoſed, he acknowledged the ſuperiority of his antagoniſt: for, ſays he, I only deceived the birds, but Parrhaſius has deceived me, who am myſelf a painter.

submissive posture of his three disciples!—The scene in all its parts is grand!—all sublime!

O! could my fancy paint, in strains divine,
The great RAPHAEL, in his art sublime,
From rival art should bear a laurel due,
For stamping nature in his skill anew.

Then to conclude. The very design of the pencil; the surprising effects, by which the mind is impressed, highly command our notice and respect.

In these observations, very far would I be from insinuating, that the beauties of this art ought to be levelled with those of MUSIC. Considered in one light, they may gain the pre-eminence, and only in one, as I have hinted. The art of PAINTING seems rather to be the improvement of an age, devoted to luxury and effeminacy. But the more noble art of MUSIC could humanize the savage breast of the rough *Arcadians*, and that by its soft, refined melody. The graces of the one, tend rather to nourish a vitiated taste; but the sublimity of the other, invigorates the soul with great, with manly sentiments.

What is it but the power of Music, that enraptures the martial mind with glowing thoughts for victory. By the sound of the trumpet, cornet, and the flute, arms with arms in mutual conflict clash. Whole fields of men are all convulsed—and yet they dream of conquests! but in their dream, with raptures extatic—grasp in their bosom, death itself—then smile in agony!

Nor is the influence of Music confined to these sublime passions. But it is a spark, which can inflame the friendly mind with sympathy and compassion; inspire a lover's breast with a rising ardor of affection; and kindle in the soul the long train of tender emotions.

When gnawing cares disturb my breast,
May MUSIC's winding notes refresh,
With harmony that's sweet and gay,
And on the mind does gently play.
Where it unfolds with pleasing turns,
The secret mazes, then resounds,
With soft'ning echoes, nice and fine,
Deep in the caverns of the mind.

Is it possible that such should be the charming beauty—such the commanding influence of MUSIC? I call to witness those spacious walls of THEBES. I call to witness all those embroiled factions of *Sparta*, which the melodious lyre of TERPANDER

quelled and allayed. And now let us mount one step higher. Let us compare it with POETRY; and finally conclude, whether its glory cannot be eclipsed.

POETRY, by its efficacy and energy, rules with supreme dominion the mind of man. Love and hatred, joy and grief, hope and fear, all the passions, all the affections are equally devoted to its sovereign power As for MUSIC, it can only excite the social and pleasing emotions. By POETRY we are interested in the councils of the cabinet, and debates of the senate; By this we are led into the causes of war; the exploits of the brave and noble; the closing scenes and issue of battles. But, by MUSIC, it is impossible to unfold the smallest connection or spring of action.

The curious, while they attempt to trace through the annals of time, and search out their first dawnings of POETRY, involve themselves in mazes, dark and perplexing. This is evident, that in the ancient periods of the world, when oblations were offered up to the DEITY; then the sacred canticles, clad with the pomp of verse, adorned the solemn act. But why was it thought to be more than human? This idea was impressed partly by the inexpressible beauty of the pause, the cadence, and the feet; but chiefly from the harmony of style, the grandeur and sublimity of sentiments.

I am not insensible, that even in the best class of writers, some there are, who would fain eclipse the lustre of this art. I will readily conclude, if, as they assert, its highest end is only to flatter and please the fancy, that then it is an object justly worthy the scorn of wisdom. But can such an opinion be indulged? Truly not by the impartial. Does not the plain absurdity of it flash conviction? In every species of Poetry, the instruction of the heart, and regulation of the manners, ought ever to be in view, as the two grand and invariable designs. Each in a tract, peculiar to itself, aims ultimately at the same thing. Such is the organization of the soul; such the various springs of action.

And now, though the order of my discourse may require it; though a fond attachment to the subject may prompt me, yet, the scantiness of time forbids a particular attention to the beauties of the comedy and satire, the ode, the elegy and pastoral. A superior excellency of the tragedy and epic poem, commands our more deliberate notice.

The various properties of these arts have been well digested, and handed out by fruitful geniuses, with almost sacred encomiums. What can I say, that has not been said, of dramatic

productions ? Shall I unfold the most essential and constituent parts of tragedy ? Consider particularly the nature of the fable; the properties of the characters ; the congruity of the sentiments ; and conformity of the language ? But all those inquiries are now grown old in rusting volumes. Shall I examine into the different springs of the passions ; show why, and how we are thus wonderfully affected by the fictions of the stage ? This is nice and curious ; but, to to the accuracy of a Kaimes I submit it

It is strange, indeed, that such a similarity as is maintained, between epic and dramatic productions, should pass so much unnoticed by the view of the learned ; they steadily keep up the same design ; the same characters ; and the same unity of action ; I don't say that there should not be a difference with respect to the subjects. The form of the drama was rather intended to influence the soft and pathetic emotions : But the epic poem is best calculated to excite those which are sublime and heroic, It may be said with truth, that for grandeur of conception, an heroic poem is the noblest production of man : It crowns its objects with lustre unparallel, and glory inexpressible. For conviction of this, let us, for a moment, gaze on the clusters of geniuses. which adorns yon eastern hemisphere ! This has not been equalled since sun and moon endured. This is an eternal monument of my assertion. What shall we say of Homer, the prince of poets ? Did ever subject preserve its dignity better than that of his Iliad ?, How remarkably does each character maintain its properties through every scene of action His hero is invariable—his whole mind is inspired with great and manly sentiments. He is enterprizing in council, vigorous in his designs, and daring in his exploits.

How are we captivated and amazed, when Homer describes the battle of the Gods ! Here we may cry out,—Ye infernals be astonished ! Earth quake with fear ! Ye universal systems crumble into nothing !

" Heav'n in loud thunders bids the trumpet sound,
" And wide beneath them groans the rending ground,
" Deep in the dismal regions of the dead,
" The infernal monarch rear'd his horrid head,
" Leap'd from his throne, least Neptune's arm should lay
" His dark dominions open to the day,
" And pour in light on Pluto's dread abodes,
" Abhor'd by men, and dreadful e'en to gods !"

I might produce many instances of the true sublime from other writers, both ancient and modern. There cannot be a

more lively, or a more beautiful picturesque, than the following description in Milton.

> Now wav'd their fiery swords, and in the air
> Made horrid circles; two broad Suns their shields
> Blaz'd opposite; while expectation stood in horror.

Before I dismiss this subject, I would just take notice, that no human production can be compared to the poetic grandeur and sublimity of the sacred scriptures. In these divine writings, we may see the mountains weighed in scales, and the hills in a balance:—We behold the caverns of the great deep laid open;—we behold all nature struck with awful attention;—and there we behold the heavens and the earth trembling, and flying from the presence of the Lord! Let us view the terrors of the Almighty! shudder with amazement, and cry out with the Psalmist: "Then the earth shook and trembled, the foun-" dations also of the hills moved, and were shaken; because " he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, " and fire out of his mouth devoured; Coals were kindled by " it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and dark-" ness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and " did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind."

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